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Evaluation

Management response to the evaluation of the UNDP strategic plan, 2008-2013

Context and background

1. This report summarizes the response of UNDP management to the evaluation of the organization's strategic plan, 2008-2013. The purposes of the evaluation were to support UNDP accountability to the Executive Board by providing evidence-based analysis and inputs into the development of the new UNDP strategic plan, 2014-2017. This management response to the evaluation of the strategic plan, 2008-2013, should be read in conjunction with related management responses to the evaluations of the global, regional and South-South programmes, and the cumulative review of the strategic plan.

2. As noted in the evaluation, UNDP is a stronger organization than it was when the strategic plan was developed, and the organization has continued to make an important development contribution across all its focus areas. Since 2008, UNDP has contributed to bringing the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) agenda from 'vision' to implementation; built the capacity of national counterparts in high prevalence countries to address HIV/AIDS comprehensively as a development rather than simply a health issue; contributed to strengthening governance through better linkages between national and sub-national development agendas and through strengthening democratic institutions; and helped embed climate change mitigation and disaster reduction strategies in national development plans across the globe. UNDP is an important link between humanitarian and development actors in post-crisis settings, and has been an important contributor to preventing violence in fragile settings as well as assisting countries and communities to rebuild livelihoods and re-establish stable institutions and development pathways after conflict.

3. UNDP is also recognized as having made an important contribution to national efforts aimed at pro-poor policy development, particularly with regard to strengthening the pro-poor enabling environment for policy-making. As 2015 approaches, accelerating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals remains a key focus of UNDP work in this area. Since 2009, the organization has

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been more active in meeting demand from countries for strategic support on the Millennium Development Goals and the MDG acceleration framework (MAF), which was designed as a United Nations system process to address off-track goals and has become the main vehicle of UNDP improved support in this area, having been applied thus far in 45 countries since 2010.

4. Making UNDP and its work more evidence-based has also been a key part of the agenda for organizational change, launched by the Administrator in 2011. The MAF is proving highly successful largely because it exemplifies a more evidenced-based approach, drawing on existing evidence, policies and strategies in order to devise concrete, prioritized country action plans jointly and coherently with the United Nations system. The MAF not only exemplifies the stronger results focus, which has been evident in recent years, but is also an example of how UNDP is moving upstream to target transformational change.

5. UNDP is confident that although progress has been faster in some areas than in others, there has been a perceptible and meaningful improvement in the extent and quality of gender mainstreaming in UNDP during the strategic plan period. Through that period, UNDP contributions to gender equality have grown from 30 per cent of country outcomes in 2008 to 71 per cent in 2012. Gender marker data show a similar pattern. From 2010 to 2012, 36 per cent of UNDP gender-marker rated programming expenditures either made "a significant contribution to gender equality" or "had gender equality as a principal objective", the highest categories of contribution.

6. More broadly, UNDP success with mainstreaming approaches, including gender equality, capacity development, the human development based approach and South-South cooperation, has indeed been mixed and there continue to be variations in performance across the organization with regard to mainstreaming and managing all of these approaches and issues. Although progress has been made, UNDP aspires for excellence; lessons learned from UNDP work in gender and other cross-cutting approaches during the current strategic plan period will continue to inform learning in all UNDP programmes in the future. Strengthening quality assurance processes in the full programme and project cycle will allow UNDP to be increasingly rigorous in ensuring that approaches outlined in the strategic plan are substantively reflected in its work.

7. Since the mid-term review of the strategic plan (DP/2011/22), the organization has prioritized being more focused and at the same time ever more responsive to country demands for more synergistic and issue-based interventions. UNDP has been stressing the interdependencies of social, economic and environmental challenges facing the world and advocating for approaches and strategies that are reflective of this, such as 'triple wins for development', the connection between inclusive governance and social resilience and the poverty/environment nexus. Based on the unique added value and experience of UNDP in working toward the MDGs these past 13 years, the organization is now poised to play a pivotal role in helping to shape the post-2015 agenda. The next strategic plan, 2014-2017, will be designed on an issues-based rather than practice-based architecture, and measures are already being taken to align organizational approaches accordingly.

8. As noted in the evaluation, UNDP faces a very different substantive and operational context than five years ago, including stronger demands and higher expectations from the full spectrum of its partners, old and new. Owing to changes in the UNDP strategic planning system and its stronger culture of results, significant progress has been made in meeting the challenge of explaining the organization's

particular contribution to important development results. This will continue to be challenging, especially because the organization is unswerving in its commitment to work with countries in tackling the deep-rooted and often most intractable impediments to development progress, and to ensuring that gains are truly inclusive and sustainable. More and more often, achieving this entails greater focus and resolve in standing for the kinds of programmes that are likely to drive lasting, equitable change with strong strategic potential. Much of UNDP work is dedicated to tackling these kinds of long-term challenges and trade-offs, where progress is often harder to quantify and communicate, and where the UNDP core/non-core funding model presents particular challenges with regard to predictability for long-term commitment.

9. UNDP recognizes that efficiency and sustainability are key dimensions of performance, and continually seeks to improve the way they are tracked and measured. As an organization that places a premium on national ownership, and prioritizes national implementation at the project level, the identification of appropriate measures and useful benchmarking standards has been challenging. UNDP is committed to managing the trade-offs associated with pursuing efficiency while prioritizing the strengthening of national institutions, arrangements and processes– especially as a means of fostering sustainability.

Strategic planning and UNDP

10. As highlighted in the evaluation report, a key element of the organization's efforts to improve results management is the overall progress, particularly over the past two years, in the UNDP strategic planning system. The introduction of an annual business plan and its integration into the unit-level integrated work plan of country offices and headquarters bureaux has allowed the organization to mobilize its efforts more strategically, and have a coordinated operational approach to achieving results across the strategic plan focus areas. The organization continues to learn and explore new approaches around balancing country-level demand and organizational priorities, and then translating them into a coherent results picture that allows partners to see and understand the aggregate UNDP contribution to development results at the country, regional and global levels.

11. Stepping up efforts at headquarters is recognized as just one part of the puzzle. UNDP remains committed to ensuring that the national results that it pursues with its country partners are strategic and transformational. Country offices stand at the interface between UNDP, with its corporate standards and accountabilities, and national partners, with their own policies and procedures. UNDP is working hard to be an organization that increasingly harnesses innovative and collaborative approaches (for example, multifunctional platforms) to deliver programmes that prioritize interventions which can be scaled up and used to provide the upstream policy options that partner countries value most highly and are demanding from UNDP.

12. The agenda for organizational change focused initially on headquarters and regional levels; attention is now fixed on country offices as the front line of creating real development value and meeting expectations of efficiency and sustainability. Over the last three years, UNDP has worked to strengthen results-based performance management, programme cycle management, and learning from evaluation. Now oversight and reporting are being consolidated through the Country Office Support Initiative (COSI). COSI is helping country offices to manage the interface between country and corporate levels, and to ensure that UNDP commitments to national ownership are well balanced with organizational commitments to focus on

programmatic quality and organizational accountability for results. UNDP has also renewed its focus on improving planning, monitoring and evaluation systems as part of the business models review under the agenda for organizational change.

13. Since 2008, UNDP has been purposeful and innovative in its efforts to effectively manage an imperfect strategic plan results framework. The organization has learned lessons in the areas of performance management, results reporting, the value of the gender marker and capacity development tracker, and the use of country and corporate outcomes, outcome indicators and output dimensions since the mid-term review. The organization's move to become a more evidence-based development actor, with a mastery of measurement and data in its areas of focus, has been challenging but is evolving in a robust and positive direction. Progress, including the shift in organizational culture, is both perceptible and broad. The challenges in coming years will be to generalize this progress in all offices, to achieve more even performance across offices; and to refine performance and knowledge management structures and processes within UNDP in order to take full advantage of the improved data at the organization's disposal, to deepen the UNDP learning culture and put it in service to stronger results on the ground. Subject to Executive Board approval of a strong results framework with SMART indicators for every level of results, UNDP is poised to reap the benefits of learning for deepened development dialogue with all its partners and stakeholders, as it implements the new strategic plan, 2014-2017.

Annex. Recommendations and management response

Recommendation 1. The new strategic plan needs to be clear about the direction it wants UNDP to take and UNDP management needs to ensure that adequate tools are put in place to support and monitor implementation of the strategies and priorities contained in the plan.				
Management response UNDP agrees with this recommendation. The new strategic plan, 2014-2017, will be clearer about the future direction of UNDP. The organization recognizes the need to be more systematic in ensuring that adequate incentives and capacities are in place so that its priorities and approaches are more effectively reflected and implemented in all its programmes. As noted in the evaluation, UNDP made great efforts in gender and capacity development and, having learned from those efforts, is in a stronger position to support the use of its other approaches and priorities systematically over the coming years. UNDP is intent on ensuring a smoother, more managed transition to the new strategic plan, which includes developing stronger incentives to support the deployment of its approaches.				
Key action(s)	**Timeframe**	**Responsible unit(s)**	**Tracking**	
			Comments	**Status**
1.1 The new strategic plan provides greater clarity and focus for the future work of UNDP.	September 2013	Executive Office		
1.2 UNDP develops adequate tools which enable the approaches outlined in the plan to be used fully in its programmes, and which support and monitor implementation of the strategic plan.	January 2014	Bureau for Development Policy (BDP), Executive Office		
1.3 UNDP provides targeted support to country offices in order to support their capacity to transition to the new strategic plan, including through COSI.	Ongoing	Regional bureaux, BDP, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), Executive Office		
Recommendation 2. The new strategic plan needs to explicitly address the trade-offs that occur as a result of the UNDP business model.				
Management response UNDP agrees with this recommendation. UNDP organizational results are defined at an organizational level and determined at the national level based on national demand for UNDP engagement in specific areas. Improved business analytics and pipeline management will further improve the ability of UNDP to ensure that there is a convergence between its priorities and demand for its support in key areas. Learning lessons from implementation of the current strategic plan, UNDP is intent on ensuring a smoother, more managed transition to the new strategic plan, including more clear guidance to its programmes on managing trade-offs that emerge from the approaches and priorities laid out in the strategic plan. Issues related to the UNDP funding model and associated trade-offs will continue to feature in performance monitoring and reporting to the Executive Board. UNDP will also use the new integrated results and resources framework to underpin a more robust reflection of the relationship between results and resources.				
2.1 Reporting under the new strategic plan provides more robust analysis of the trade-offs that occur as a result of the UNDP business model, including the relationship between national demand and organizational priorities; between transformational and short-term results; and between funding sources and the pursuit of durability in the long term.	September 2013	Executive Office		

2.2 Stronger UNDP performance management and business analytics enable more accurate forecasting of business model implications for achieving results under the new strategic plan.	December 2014	Executive Office		
Recommendation 3. The new strategic plan should emphasize the priority of support at the country level, and explicitly recognize that no matter how good the work is at the centre, it is at the country level where the difference is being made.				
Management response UNDP acts at the global, regional and country levels, and prioritizes support at the country level where development progress affects people's lives. UNDP recognizes the importance of the global and regional policy functions inter alia to support country offices and to benefit all partners through shared knowledge and learning. UNDP accepts that the agenda for organizational change now needs to focus on country offices. The 2013 annual business plan includes important measures to capitalize on more than three years of intensive effort to improve the organization's results-based management culture, and to strengthen country office performance and learning through greater focus, strategic priority-setting, ongoing efforts such as COSI and refining UNDP business models.				
3.1 The new strategic plan clearly emphasizes that support for the country level is the priority of UNDP, and that it is at the country level that UNDP makes the greatest difference.	September 2013	Executive Office		
3.2 See key action 1.3 above.	Ongoing	Regional bureaux, BDP, BCPR, Executive Office		
3.3 UNDP's future global programme leverages the global policy function to optimize the policy mix in order to service countries and to promote knowledge sharing and South-South exchange.	January 2014	BDP, BCPR, Executive Office, regional bureaux		
Recommendation 4. When assessing performance, the new strategic plan needs to take the country programme as the unit of analysis. This will allow a more realistic and meaningful assessment, taking into account the country-level context.				
Management response UNDP understands the recommendation, and agrees that there is the need to establish clearer performance criteria as part of a stronger performance monitoring system. UNDP recognizes the central role of the country programme as the main 'unit of analysis' in managing the organization's performance; UNDP currently monitors performance against country programme outcome indicators and country management indicators as an integral part of its performance monitoring and reporting architecture. The challenge of aggregating data to analyse organizational performance, while understanding the unique country context within which results are generated, is one that is faced by all large development actors. UNDP has made notable progress in its use of performance data since 2011, and continues to build its own capacity to produce high quality, contextualized and nuanced performance metrics that go beyond compliance-oriented reporting to provide a meaningful picture of what is working and what is not.				
4.1 The new strategic plan has a results framework with SMART indicators at every result level that can be incorporated into country-level programming, including new country programme documents and results and resources frameworks.	September 2013	Executive Office, BDP, regional bureaux		

4.2 UNDP annual reports ensure that analysis of UNDP performance is founded on data and analysis of country level performance, and is reflective of country context.	Ongoing	Executive Office, regional bureaux		
4.3 UNDP develops a stronger and more integrated performance monitoring system that provides a stronger evidence base for better evaluations.	October 2014	Executive Office, Bureau of Management		